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EXDIS

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PREL, MARR, MOPS, SY, US, LE
SUBJECT: CODEL TOWER'S CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT
- ASSAD FEB 21 - FULL MEMCON

25X1

REF: DAMASCUS 1326

1. (S-ENTIRE TEXT).

2. SUMMARY: REFTEL PROVIDES SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FOLLOWING FULL MEMCON. END SUMMARY.

3. SENATOR TOWER AND CONGRESSMAN MCCAIN, ACCOMPANIED BY MCGOVERN AND LOCHER (SENATE STAFF), CHARGE AND POLCOUNS, HAD AN HOUR AND A QUARTER MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD FEB 21. THE MEETING FINALLY BEGAN AT 1315 LOCAL, EVEN THOUGH THE PRESIDENCY HAD KNOWN FOR SEVERAL DAYS THAT SENATOR TOWER PLANNED TO DEPART NO LATER THAN 1300 FROM DAMASCUS TO FULFILL COMMITMENTS IN WASHINGTON. ASSAD APOLOGIZED FOR THE DELAY AND FOR NOT HAVING RECEIVED TOWER THE PREVIOUS WEEK -- HE SAID HE HAD HAD A COLD AND JOKED ABOUT THE SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY BEING LESS EFFICIENT THAN IN THE U.S.

4. DURING THE INITIAL PICTURE TAKING, ASSAD, WHO LOOKED AS WELL PHYSICALLY AS WE HAVE SEEN HIM-- ANIMATED, ALERT, QUICK, GOOD COLOR -- JOKED ABOUT HIS COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING, EXPLAINED TO HIM IN 1974 BY KISSINGER, THAT THE CONGRESS DOES NOT REPRESENT THE USG. WITH A SMILE, ASSAD BAITED THE SENATOR SOMEWHAT ON THE LATTER'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS FOLLOWING HIS LAST VISIT TO DAMASCUS IN EARLY JANUARY -- "I TOLD THE FOREIGN MINISTER", ASSAD SAID, THAT HE COULD NOT HAVE EXPLAINED OUR POSITION WELL, SINCE SENATOR TOWER HAD BEEN "AGAINST SYRIA" WHEN HE REPORTED TO THE CONGRESS.

5. GOALS: SENATOR TOWER NOTED THAT KHADDAM'S EXPOSITIONS

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WERE LEARNED AND COGENT AND THAT IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE USG AND SARG ARE IN AGREEMENT ON OUR GOALS IN LEBANON, BUT WE DIFFER ON IMPLEMENTATION. ASSAD AGREED AND NODDED AGAIN WHEN TOWER SAID SYRIA DOES NOT WANT PARTITION BUT DOES WANT A GNU.

6. THE EIGHT POINTS: TOWER SAID SYRIA HAS NOW MAJOR TACTICAL ADVANTAGE AND HAS ACHIEVED TACTICAL VICTORY. HE HOPED SYRIA WOULD HELP US GET A POLITICAL SOLUTION. IF NOT, THE ADVANTAGE MIGHT DISSOLVE INTO STRATEGIC DISADVANTAGE. TOWER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE EIGHT POINTS MET MOST OF SYRIAN CONCERNS; WHAT DOES SYRIA REJECT IN THEM?

7. ASSAD RESPONDED, RATHER CURIOUSLY, THAT IF THE SENATOR WOULD TELL HIM WHICH INDIVIDUAL POINTS "YOU" SUPPORT, HE WOULD SAY HE SUPPORTED NONE OF THEM. FURTHER, SAUDI ARABIA HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THESE PROPOSALS. HOWEVER, IT WOULD NOT MATTER WHO HAD WRITTEN THE POINTS, SARG IS AGAINST THEM. (COMMENT: IT IS JUST POSSIBLE THAT ASSAD WAS HINTING HE BELIEVED THE USG MIGHT BE BEHIND THE SAUDI INITIATIVE, DESPITE OUR POSITION ON THE EIGHT POINTS, WHICH HE KNOWS WELL.)

8. EQUAL FOOTING: ASSAD SAID HE WANTED TO EMPHASIZE VERY SERIOUSLY FOR SENATOR TOWER, AS HE HAD WITH EVERY US ENVOY, THAT IF THE USG WISHES TO DEAL WITH SARG, IT MUST DO SO ON AN EQUAL FOOTING. THIS IS TRUE FOR THE USSR, FOR THE USG AND EVERY OTHER COUNTRY. THE USG IS "FIGHTING" (HE REPEATED THE WORD TWICE). SYRIA IS NOT. SARG HELPS THE LEBANESE AND WOULD HAVE FOUGHT WITH THEM HAD IT BEEN NECESSARY, BUT IT IS THE LEBANESE WHO ARE FIGHTING IN LEBANON FOR THEIR COUNTRY. THE USG HAS DESTROYED HUNDREDS OF LEBANESE HOMES. AS FOR STRATEGIC DISADVANTAGE, THE PEOPLE'S CAUSE WILL ULTIMATELY SUCCEED.

9. SYRIA'S GOALS: TOWER REPEATED THAT IF THERE IS "INTRANSIGENCE" TOWARD AGREEMENT ON A GNU, LEBANON WILL DISSOLVE INTO PARTITION, A STRATEGIC DISADVANTAGE FOR SYRIA. WHAT IS SARG'S GOAL AND HOW DOES IT PROPOSE TO GET THERE? ASSAD SAID SYRIA WANTS TO RETURN LEBANON TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE THE INVASION AND HAD PROVIDED "10'S" OF PROPOSALS TO THE US. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE, WHICH SYRIA WANTS THE US TO IMPLEMENT, WAS PRESIDENT REAGAN'S "COMMITMENT", CONVEYED THROUGH HADIB, TO A USG/SARG "AGREEMENT" ON CEASEFIRE FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY THE BEGINNING OF FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. ASSAD REHEARSED THIS EPISODE AT SOME LENGTH, CONCLUDING THAT IT

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TAGS: PREL, MARR, MOPS, SY, US, LE

SUBJECT: LOREL TOWER'S CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT IS DIFFICULT TO NURTURE BILATERAL CONFIDENCE IF AGREEMENTS ARE NOT CARRIED OUT.

10. SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS: SENATOR TOWER NOTED IT IS A USG OBJECTIVE TO CONVINCE ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW; THIS WAS THE THRUST OF MAY 17 AND ISRAEL HAS ALREADY WITHDRAWN TO THE AWALI. ASSAD ASKED IF THIS WAS "ACCORDING TO THE AGREEMENT", TOWER SAID YES, AND THAT HE THOUGHT THE MARINES HAD EVEN HAD SOME "CONFRONTATIONS" (I.E. WITH THE ISRAELIS IN BEIRUT). WE ARE CONVINCED, THE SENATOR CONTINUED, THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO LEAVE AND WILL DO SO IF ITS NORTHERN BORDER CAN BE SECURED BY APPROPRIATE ARRANGEMENTS AND THAT ISRAEL IS PREPARED TO SEE SOME SYRIAN PRESENCE REMAIN IN LEBANON, IF THIS PRESENCE IS NOT THREATENING TO ISRAEL. WAS THERE ANY SECURITY ARRANGEMENT ON THE NORTHERN BORDER THAT SARG WOULD ACCEPT? ASSAD

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APPEARED TAKEN ABACK BY THIS, AND ASKED TOWER IF HE WAS SAYING ISRAEL WOULD TOLERATE A SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE. THE SENATOR SAID IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT NOT A LARGE MILITARY PRESENCE BUT SOME PRESENCE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOI PROVIDED SOME SECURITY ARRANGEMENT WAS MADE FOR THE NORTHERN BORDER.

11. FURTHER, THE SENATOR SAID, "WE RESPECT TRADITIONAL SYRIAN INFLUENCE IN LEBANON AND EXPECT IT TO CONTINUE."

12. ASSAD CONTINUED TO APPEAR ASTOUNDED BY THE SENATOR'S MENTION OF RESIDUAL SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE, AND RESPONDED MERELY THAT THE EIGHT POINTS DO NOT EMBODY WHAT THE SENATOR HAD JUST SAID (YET ANOTHER SLIGHT INDICATION THAT ASSAD MAY BELIEVE THE EIGHT POINTS ORIGINATE WITH THE USG, NO MATTER HOW OFTEN WE DISCLAIM AUTHORSHIP).

13. TOWER RESPONDED THAT SINCE SYRIA WILL NOT ACCEPT THE EIGHT POINTS NOR ACCEPT SIMULTANEOUS WITHDRAWAL, WHAT WOULD SYRIA ACCEPT?

14. IN LIEU OF THE EIGHT POINTS: ASSAD SAID IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE AGREEMENT IN GENEVA THAT LEBANON WOULD REMAIN "ARAB" IS NOT A MERE RHETORICAL FLOURISH. ARABISM IMPOSES DUTIES, E.G. THE ARAB LEAGUE CHARTER, WHICH CONFLICTS WITH MAY 17, AN AGREEMENT WHICH TAKES AWAY LEBANON'S ARABISM. TOWER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT; ONE OF THE EIGHT POINTS IS ABROGATION OF MAY 17; IF ABROGATION OCCURS, HOW WILL SYRIA GET ITS TROOPS OUT? THE SENATOR AGAIN REITERATED THAT HE IS NOT A SPOKESMAN FOR THE USG, AND THE USG TAKES NO POSITION ON THE EIGHT POINTS.

15. ASSAD SAID CLEARLY SYRIA WILL "NOT ACCEPT NAMING US IN DOCUMENTS WHICH LINK US WITH ISRAEL." WITH SOME ANIMATION, HE SAID HE HAD OFTEN TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE "ONE-PEOPLE-BUT-TWO-INDEPENDENT-STATES" SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH LEBANON, WHICH IS NO DIFFERENT FROM SYRIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ANY OTHER ARAB STATE. HE WANTED TO REITERATE AGAIN THAT LEBANON IS AN INDEPENDENT STATE, A FACT WHICH DOES NOT CONTRADICT THE TRUTH THAT "IDEOLOGICALLY ALL ARABS ARE FOR ARAB UNITY." UNFORTUNATELY "SOME USG OFFICIALS MISUNDERSTAND" -- WHY DOES PRESIDENT REAGAN SAY SYRIA WANTS A GREATER SYRIA?

16. GEMAYEL, THE PRESIDENCY AND GNU: SENATOR TOWER PRESSED ON. THE US FAVORS A GNU AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION LEBANON, HOWEVER, IS FRACTIONATING. HOW CAN THE PARTIES BE ASSEMBLED TO FORM A GNU. JUMBLATT HAS CALLED FOR GEMAYEL'S RESIGNATION AND TRIAL. DOES THE SARG AGREE?

17. ASSAD SAID THIS IS LEBANESE BUSINESS -- SARG NEITHER ACCEPTS HIM NOR REJECTS HIM. CERTAINLY, GEMAYEL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PUSHING THE LAF TO DESTROY PART OF BEIRUT. TOWER ASKED AGAIN -- IN ASSAD'S OWN OPINION, MUST GEMAYEL GO FOR RECONCILIATION TO TAKE PLACE? ASSAD SAID, "IN TRUTH, WE HAVE NOT YET FORMULATED OUR POSITION." GEMAYEL'S RESIGNATION WAS RAISED BY LEBANESE NATIONALISTS AFTER THE BOMBING OF BEIRUT. IF ALL THE LEBANESE WERE TO AGREE HE MUST GO, THEN THAT MUST HAPPEN. HOWEVER, ASSAD SAID (SHIFTING HIS GROUND SLIGHTLY TO WHAT WE BELIEVE HE WISHED TO INDICATE WAS HIS REAL POSITION), SENATOR TOWER MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS NO "PERSONAL CONCERN" INVOLVED. SARG IS FOR GEMAYEL IF HE SHARES SARG'S GOALS FOR LEBANON

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AND IS NOT WITH HIM IF HE DOES NOT. THIS MAY BE A DIFFERENT POSITION FROM THAT OF AMAL AND THE NSF WHO REGARD HIM PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BEIRUT BOMBINGS.

18. SYRIAN SACRIFICE AND PHALANGE SELFISHNESS:

ASSAD SAID USG FORGETS THAT SYRIA HAS BEEN NINE YEARS IN LEBANON, ORIGINALLY DIVIDING THE COMBATANTS AND WAS THE TARGET OF THEM BOTH. THOUSANDS OF SYRIANS HAVE DIED. OFTEN SARG HAD CONTEMPLATED WITHDRAWAL BUT THE LEBANESE WOULD NOT PERMIT THIS, JUST AS THE LEBANESE HAD BEGGED SYRIA TO RESCUE LEBANON IN 1976 -- "WE ARE NOT (REPEAT NOT) INVADERS." HE RECALLED THE VARIOUS SYRIAN EFFORTS TO OBTAIN POLITICAL RECONCILIATION, NOTING IN PARTICULAR THAT JUST PRIOR TO THE ISRAELI INVASION SARG BELIEVED IT WAS CLOSE TO SETTLEMENT. HOWEVER, WHEN ISRAEL (IN 1981) SHOT DOWN THE SYRIAN HELICOPTERS AND SARG IMMEDIATELY INSERTED MISSILES INTO LEBANON, BASHIR GEMAYEL, AT THAT TIME "HEAD OF THE PHALANGE," CANCELLED THE LEBANESE RECONCILIATION MEETING WHICH WAS TO HAVE OCCURRED ON THAT VERY DAY. AFTERWARDS, HE REFUSED TO MEET WITH THE OTHER LEBANESE PARTIES, SINCE "ISRAEL WAS SAYING WE ARE ON OUR WAY TO YOU."

19. TRUE GNU: TOWER ASKED, COULD THERE NOT BE A PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT UNTIL ISRAEL WITHDRAWS? ASSAD SAID THIS WAS TRIED BUT IT DIDN'T WORK BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT COULDN'T AGREE AMONG ITSELF. TOWER NOTED GEMAYEL IS READY TO MAKE SOME CONCESSIONS, AND SOME KIND OF GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY NEEDED.

20. ASSAD THEN SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THE LEGITIMACY OF THE "NATIONAL GOVERNMENT" WHICH HAD INSISTED ON SYRIA'S HELP, SPEAKING OF THE NATIONALIST CREDENTIALS OF FRANJIYA (PRESIDENT AND ALSO REPRESENTING THE PHALANGE AND CHAM'UN OF THE LEBANESE FRONT) AND KARAMI. THUS SYRIA ENTERED AT THE INSISTENCE OF PATRIOTIC LEBANESE, AND AT A TIME WHEN THERE WAS NO ISRAEL INVASION (I.E., PATRIOTIC LEBANESE BELIEVED OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE WAS NEEDED TO RESCUE THEIR COUNTRY). ASKED IF HE WAS SAYING THAT GEMAYEL SHOULD BE REPLACED BY FRANJIYA OR SOMEONE LIKE HIM, ASSAD SAID "NO", HE WAS ONLY SEEKING TO EXPLAIN THAT NATIONAL UNITY HAD EXISTED AND THERE HAD BEEN A CONSTITUTIONAL PARLIAMENT WHICH HAD ELECTED FRANJIYA DURING ITS CONSTITUTIONAL FOUR-YEAR PERIOD. ASSAD DID NOT MEAN THE SAME PEOPLE MUST BE THE ONES TO ASK SYRIA TO LEAVE. HE DID DEFINITELY MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WHICH MADE SUCH A REQUEST MUST NOT DO SO AS A RESULT OF OUTSIDE DIRECTION. THERE IS NO GNU OR REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON NOW, NOR CAN THERE BE WHILE ISRAEL IS STILL THERE.

21. EQUITABLE NATIONAL DIALOGUE: PROBABLY NINETY PERCENT OF THE LEBANESE PEOPLE, ASSAD SAID, HAVE TURNED AGAINST GEMAYEL AND A MAJORITY OF THE LAF HAVE TURNED TO THE OPPOSITION. "LEGITIMACY" IS "ALMOST" WITH THE OPPOSITION NOW. SYRIA, HOWEVER, HE STRESSED, DOES NOT WANT ANYONE TO BE CONQUERED, SINCE THERE MUST BE NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND A SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE NECESSITATES THAT THERE BE NO WINNERS AND NO LOSERS.

22. SARG RELATIONS WITH A TRUE GNU: ASKED HOW SYRIA WOULD RESPOND TO REQUESTS FROM A GENUINE GNU, ASSAD SAID SARG WILL DO "EVERYTHING" SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD ASK IT TO DO. ASKED IF THIS WOULD BE SO IF GEMAYEL WERE TO CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT, ASSAD SAID YES AS LONG AS A REAL GNU IS FORMED. SYRIAN INFLUENCE IN LEBANON, HE SAID, IS AGES OLD AND DOES NOT SPRING FROM THE CURRENT MILITARY PRESENCE. SHOULD A REAL GNU ASK US TO LEAVE, OR SHOULD SUCH A GNU ASK US TO STAY, "WE WILL NOT STAY" -- WE HAVE

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SUFFERED ENOUGH. AT PRESENT WE MUST STAY, ASSAD SAID, TO DEFEND BOTH LEBANON AND OURSELVES.

23. ASSAD NOTED, WITH AN OBVIOUS IRONIC INTENT, THAT AT THE TIME OF THE ISRAELI INVASION, THE USG'S PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY DID NOT REPEAT NOT ASK SYRIA TO DO "ANYTHING." HE ACKNOWLEDGED SENATOR TOWER'S REMARK THAT SYRIA HAS ENORMOUS INFLUENCE OVER SOME OF THE PARTIES, CAN ENCOURAGE A REASONABLE SETTLEMENT, AND SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT "EXTREMIST ELEMENTS" ASSERTING THEIR PRESENCE IN LEBANON. THE SENATOR FURTHER NOTED THAT ISRAEL ALSO HAS CONCERNS ABOUT EXTREMIST ELEMENTS BUT THAT HE BELIEVED ISRAEL WISHES TO WITHDRAW IF THOSE CONCERNS CAN BE DEALT WITH.

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24. ASSAD RESPONDED, APPARENTLY WEIGHING HIS WORDS CAREFULLY: "WHEN SYRIA IS NOT MENTIONED IN FORMS AND PROPOSITIONS, OTHER OPTIONS CAN BE DISCUSSED." LATER, THE GOL MAY TAKE APPROPRIATE SECURITY MEASURES. NOW, HOWEVER, "WE CAN DISCUSS NOTHING AS LONG AS NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDER WAY CONCERNING SYRIAN/LEBANESE RELATIONS." FOR EXAMPLE, HE WENT ON, THE EIGHT POINTS COULD HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED HAD SYRIA NOT APPEARED IN THEM. THIS (SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL) CAN BE DISCUSSED ONLY WITH A GNU AFTER ISRAEL WITHDRAWS.

25. NO LINKAGE: ASSAD STRESSED VIGOROUSLY THAT SYRIA WILL NEVER REPEAT NEVER LINK ITS WITHDRAWAL WITH ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL BECAUSE (A) LINKAGE DID NOT EXIST IN THE PAST (I.E. SYRIA IS NOT AN INVADER), AND (B) TO DO SO WOULD BE TO ADMIT THAT SYRIA IS SURRENDERING "OUR PEOPLE IN LEBANON TO ISRAEL", A DECISION WHICH WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SYRIAN AND LEBANESE PEOPLE.

26. URGENCY OF SETTLEMENT: SENATOR TOWER STATED THAT HE HAD NEVER SUGGESTED THE RELATIONSHIP WAS EQUIVALENT. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT AMBASSADOR RUMSFELD HAD MADE CLEAR THE USG RESPECT FOR SYRIA'S TRADITIONAL INFLUENCE IN LEBANON. WE WILL WITHDRAW OUR MARINES, THE SENATOR NOTED. EXCEPT FOR A DETACHMENT TO PROTECT THE US EMBASSY AND A FEW TRAINEES FOR THE LAF, OUR MARINES WILL NO LONGER BE ASHORE. POLITICAL PRESSURE ON PRES. REAGAN TO REMOVE THE MARINES HAS THEREFORE DISSIPATED. THE US FLEET WILL REMAIN IN PLACE AND THE CONGRESS WILL NOT PRESS THE PRESIDENT FOR ITS DEPARTURE.

27. OUR CONCERN NOW, SENATOR TOWER CONTINUED, IS AS FOLLOWS: WHILE ISRAEL WISHES TO WITHDRAW, IF IT FEELS THREATENED IT MAY ACT AGGRESSIVELY. WE CANNOT RESTRAIN ISRAEL. HARDLINERS IN ISRAEL WILL BE STRENGTHENED IF THERE IS A PERCEPTION OF THREAT. SURELY, THEREFORE, IT IS IN THE INTEREST OF ISRAEL, SYRIA AND LEBANON TO FIND A SETTLEMENT ASAP, I.E. TO FORM A GNU AND REMOVE THE THREAT OF TERROR, WHICH, IN FACT, MAY NOT BE SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AT ANY ONE.

28. ASSAD'S RESPONSE WAS "MAYBE". HE RECALLED THAT MORE THAN ONCE VARIOUS LEBANESE CIRCLES HAVE SAID THEY HAVE NO OBJECTION TO SECURITY MEASURES IN THE SOUTH. THERE ARE ARRANGEMENTS LEBANON CAN MAKE ITSELF, ASSAD REPEATED, THOUGH NOT OF COURSE THE SAME COLONIAL CONCESSIONS ISRAEL RECEIVED IN MAY 17. THE GOL ITSELF CAN MAKE SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS -- "WE HAVE NO OBJECTION."

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29. MAY 17 AGREEMENT: SENATOR TOWER NOTED "WE ARE NOT MARRIED FOREVER TO MAY 17." ASSAD, BECOMING RATHER ANIMATED, SAID HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE SECRETARY'S POSITION. WHEN THE SECRETARY WAS IN DAMASCUS, ASSAD HAD SAID THAT THE LEBANESE HAD MAINTAINED THE AGREEMENT HAD BEEN IMPOSED UPON THEM BY THE US AND ISRAEL. THE SECRETARY HAD SAID WE WERE "WITNESSES." IF, ASSAD CONTINUED, THE USG WAS ONLY A WITNESS, THEN WHY WAS THE SECRETARY SO ENTHUSIASTIC FOR THE MAY 17 AGREEMENT. SENATOR TOWER SAID AGAIN HE WAS NOT A SPOKESMAN FOR THE ADMINISTRATION BUT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE USG WOULD ALLOW MAY 17 TO STAND IN THE WAY OF PROGRESS TOWARDS SETTLEMENT. ASSAD, APPEARING TO BE MUCH STRUCK BY THIS REMARK, REPEATED THAT THIS WAS A VERY (REPEAT VERY) POSITIVE SIGN.

30. SARG POSITION: WHEN CONGRESSMAN MCCAIN NOTED SENATOR TOWER WOULD BE SPEAKING WITH THE SECRETARY AND AMBASSADOR RUMSFELD AFTER HIS RETURN TO WASHINGTON, ASSAD SAID HE WANTED TO SUMMARIZE THE SYRIAN VIEW. SARG WANTS A UNIFIED, INDEPENDENT LEBANON; SYRIAN PRESENCE IS LINKED TO THE DESIRE OF A TRUE GNU; THERE CAN BE NO LINKAGE BETWEEN SYRIAN AND ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL; LEBANESE PARTIES HAVE ALREADY ANNOUNCED THEY ARE READY TO MAKE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOUTH LEBANON -- SYRIA HAS NO OBJECTION, AND THE DETAILS ARE UP TO THE LEBANESE; MAY 17 MUST BE ABROGATED; WHEN GNU FORMED, SYRIA WILL PROVIDE WHATEVER HELP IT REQUIRES, INCLUDING STAYING OR LEAVING. OVERALL, ASSAD SAID, IT IS IN SYRIA'S INTEREST TO HAVE A STABLE LEBANON IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THE GEOGRAPHIC. FURTHER, SYRIA WANTS A STRONG, INDEPENDENT GOVERNMENT THERE BECAUSE THAT ALSO IS IN SYRIAN INTEREST. SYRIA HAS NO

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COLONIALIST AMBITIONS AND HAS NO DESIRE TO PROFIT ECONOMICALLY FROM LEBANON.

31. ASSAD SAID HE BELIEVED THE USG COULD HAVE A MAJOR ROLE (IN THE ARNA). BUT THERE IS NO NEED FOR THE US FLEET OR ACTS OF FORCE. THE US COULD PRESERVE ITS GOOD REPUTATION WHILE SECURING ITS OWN INTERESTS AS WELL AS THE INTEREST OF SYRIA AND LEBANON. SYRIA WILL NOT FIGHT THE US AND DOES NOT WISH TO -- US BEHAVIOR IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE. WHAT'S PAST IS PAST, HOWEVER, WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE FUTURE -- "WE DO NOT WANT ANY DISPUTE (NIZA') WITH THE USG." SYRIA DID HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE USG AND WANTS TO HAVE "GOOD, NORMAL" RELATIONS AGAIN. THERE ARE INDIVIDUALS IN THE US, WHO WERE FORMERLY IN THE ADMINISTRATION, WHOM WE RESPECT, ASSAD SAID. SYRIA WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE USG AGAIN.

32. COMMENT: PRESIDENT ASSAD WAS RELAXED AND CORDIAL THROUGHOUT THE MEETING, OBVIOUSLY WELCOMING AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN SYRIAN VIEWS TO THE CODEL, AND APPARENTLY READY TO SPEND THE USUAL SEVERAL HOURS AT IT, ONCE THE MEETING BEGAN. HE INDICATED SOME FRUSTRATION AT THE FAILURE OF SOME AMERICAN LEADERS, INCLUDING PRESIDENT REAGAN, SECRETARY SHULTZ, AND SENATOR TOWER, TO "UNDERSTAND" SYRIA'S VIEWPOINT, EVEN AFTER MANY CONVERSATIONS COVERING THE SAME GROUND; BUT THE FACT OF HIS MEETING WITH TOWER INDICATES ASSAD'S INTEREST IN CONTINUING THE BILATERAL DIALOGUE. ASSAD EMPHASIZED THAT SYRIA DOES NOT WANT TO FIGHT THE U.S. AND TRIED TO PUT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BILATERAL TENSIONS ON AMERICAN SHOULDERS. SENATOR TOWER, WHO CARRIED MOST OF THE CONVERSATION FOR THE

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CODEL'S SIDE, WAS UNDER TIME CONSTRAINTS DUE TO HIS ONWARD TRAVEL SCHEDULE AND MADE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO KEEP THE DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON PRACTICAL STEPS FOR THE FUTURE IN LEBANON, POLITELY INTERRUPTING ASSAD ON MANY OCCASIONS WHEN THE PRESIDENT LAUNCHED INTO ONE OF HIS LENGTHY HISTORICAL EXPLANATIONS, OR REHASHED OLD COMPLAINTS (SUCH AS THE SYRIAN VERSION OF THE ASSAD-HABIB MEETING OF JUNE 10, 1982 - PARAS 9 AND 23 ABOVE). TOWER WAS ABLE TO MAKE A NUMBER OF POINTS WHICH WERE SUPPORTIVE OF U.S. POLICY, IN PARTICULAR URGING ASSAD TO USE SYRIAN INFLUENCE CONSTRUCTIVELY AND URGENTLY TO HELP THE FORMATION OF A GNU.

33. COMMENT CONTINUED: ASSAD, IN HIS REMARKS, MADE NO NEW DEPARTURES FOR SYRIAN POLICY, BUT IN SEVERAL CASES CLARIFIED AND UPDATED THE SYRIAN POSITION ON LEBANON. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LINKING OF SYRIA AND ISRAEL IN ONE DOCUMENT IS ASSAD'S MAIN PROBLEM WITH THE EIGHT-POINT PLAN. ALSO, HE MADE CLEAR THAT AT THIS POINT SYRIA INTENDS TO SUPPORT OR OPPOSE GEMAYEL AND ANY NEW GNU ON THE BASIS OF WHETHER THEIR BEHAVIOR SATISFIES SYRIAN NATIONAL INTERESTS, AND HE SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDED ENDORSEMENT OR CONDEMNATION OF GEMAYEL OR OTHER LEBANESE PERSONALITIES IN ADVANCE. HE INDICATED SYRIA CONTINUES TO ADHERE TO ITS POLICY OF SUPPORTING AN EQUILIBRIUM IN THE LEBANESE POLITICAL PROCESS, AND WOULD LIKE TO GO BACK TO LEBANON'S "BETTER DAYS". THUS HIS PREFERRED SCENARIO, TO THE EXTENT IT CAN BE DISCERNED FROM HIS CAREFUL REMARKS, SEEMS TO BE THE FORMATION OF A GNU UNDER GEMAYEL WHICH WILL ABROGATE THE MAY 17 AGREEMENT AND MAKE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN THE SOUTH WHICH WILL NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVE ISRAEL BUT WHICH WILL LEAD TO ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, SO LEBANESE INDEPENDENCE AND ARABISM CAN REEMERGE. ASSAD IS, HOWEVER, KEEPING HIS OPTIONS OPEN, IN CASE THIS SCENARIO IS NOT FOLLOWED.

34. CODEL TOWER DEPARTED THE PRESIDENCY DIRECTLY TO THE AIRPORT AND WAS UNABLE TO REVIEW THIS CABLE PRIOR TO DEPARTURE.

35. BEIRUT MINIMIZE CONSIDERED. RUGH

END OF MESSAGE:

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